DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 290 CS 006 322

AUTHOR Mayfield, M. Kent
TITLE Black Dialect: What Is Its Effect on Learning to Read?
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 44p.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Aptitude; *Black Dialects; Black Students; *Cognitive Processes; English; *Interference (Language); Language Research; *Language Variation; *Learning Theories; Linguistics; Literature Reviews; Reading Achievement; *Reading Failure; Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Standard Spoken Usage

ABSTRACT

In analyzing the issue of the extent to which speaking a nonstandard dialect of English affects a child's ability to learn to read, this paper reviews linguistic and reading research from the 1960s to the present and notes how that research has changed and developed. Based on this research, the paper argues that (1) there is no direct causal relationship between speaking black English and reading failure; (2) interference is an inadequately defined concept, that phonological interference has little effect on learning to read, and that grammatical interference is not a major cause of reading problems; (3) the usual models of reading and of reading comprehension fail to consider how the syntactic and graphonological organization of written language mediate between the message and the reader's comprehension of it; and (4) the most important causes of reading failure among black English speakers can be assigned to pragmatic factors. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED215290

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Kent Mayfield

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Black Dialect: What is Its Effect on Learning to Read?

M. Kent Mayfield, Ph.D.

To what extent, if at all, does speaking a non-standard dialect of English affect learning to read? More specifically, since there is a disproportionately high percentage of reading failure among children who speak Black English, are we to conclude that not speaking the standard causes or that it merely accompanies reading failure? If the relation between Black dialect and reading failure is causal, precisely in what way could Black English impair the precess of learning to read? Whether the relation is causal or not, what should be done to increase the chances that speakers of a non-standard might learn to read fluently?

In this essay I will argue:

1. That there exists no direct causal relation between speaking Black English and failure in reading;

2. That interference, the mechanism often used to explain the assumed correclation, is an inadequately defined concept, that phonological interference has little effect on learning to tavd, and that grammatical interference is not a major cause of the problem;

3. That the usual models of reading and of reading comprehension fail to consider how the syntactic and graphonological organization of written language mediate between the message and the reader's comprehension of it; and

4. That the most important causes of the reading failure among speakers of Black English can be assigned to pragmatic factors.

I

In the early seventies, linguistics returned to educational research with sophisticated, solid theoretical foundation that has succeeded in atoning for the unfortunate "linguistic method" bequeathed to reading theory by Bloomfield and Fries. Now, freed from the phonic and whole-word legacy, reading research has begun to recognize the importance of the linguistic abilities broughtby the reader to the text, and, aware that reading involves the three systems of graphology, syntax, and semantics,

CS006322

research has begun to replace arbitrary taxonomies of comprehension lwith cognitive descriptions infleunced by information theory. But to open readingfor linguistic theory, William Labov and other socio-linguists waged a decade-long battle against arbitrary and unverifiable opinion masquerading as scientific hypothesis.

One early assertion, disposed of only with great effort, was that Black children failed to read (a) becuase their language hinders logcal thought and cognitive development, and (b) because the restricted codes of the lower class, only low levels of conceptualization are involved, and those are directed toward the here and now, whereas the elaborated code of middle class speakers orients its speakers to a more complex conceptual hierarchy that allows more abstract and qualitiatively superior cognitive behavior.

Thefirst explanation, known as the verbal deficit hypothesis derives from a 1966 book, TEACHING DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN THE PRE-SCHOOL, by Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. These two educational psychologists influenced by Basil Bernstein, creator of the distinction between elaborated and restricted codes, designed the Head Start Program to remedy the verbal deficit. Because their emphasis was psychological, not linguistic, they explored neither the functions nor the organization of Black dialect, which they scorned. To them, multiple negation was evidence of diminished capacity for logic. This sample of their style of discourse will give some idea of attitudes toward Black English that were common as late as the mid-sixties:

> The speech of the severely deprived children seems to consist not of distinct words, as does the speech of middle-class children of the same age, but rather of whole phrases or sentences that function like giant words. That is to say, these giant word units cannot be taken apart by the child and recombined; they cannotbe transformed from statements to questions, from imperatives to declaratives, and so on. Instead of saying "He's a big dog," the deprived child says "He bih daw." Instead of saying "I ain't got no juice," he says "Uai-ga-na-ju." Instead of saying "That is a red truck," he says "Da-re-truh." Once the listener has become accustomed to this style of speech, he he may begin to hear it as if all the sounds were there, and may get the impression that he is hearing articles when infact there is only a pause where the article should be. He may believe that the child is using words like it, is, if, and in, when in fact he is using the same sound for all of them--something on the order of "ih." (This becomes apparent if the child is asked to repeat the statement "It is in the box." After a few attempts in which he becomes confused as to the number of "ih's" to insert the child is likely to be reduced to a stammer. (Bereiter and Engelmann, 1966, p.34)

Basil Bernstein, not totally responsible for uses made of his theories, has retracted many of the conclusions of his 1964 paper "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences." His critics have shown that for some of his claims, Bernstein had very little evidence. For example, the fact that a group of middle-class boys scored higher on a vocabulary test than working-class boys who did well on a non-verbal tests demonstrates, in Bernstein's opinion, that members of the working-class prefer "a descriptive rather than an analytical cognitive process," thatthey "do not merely place different significances upon different classes of objects, but...their perception is of a qualitatively different order," and that their "cognitive differentiation" is comparatively underdeveloped (Bernstien, 1962). Even if Bernstien, a notorious user of jargon, had explained that "cognitive differentiation" and "qualitatively different order," one might wonder whether a vocabulary tests measures much more than the test-taker's exposure to certain lexical items. In another experiment Bernstein found that middle-class speakers have more pauses in their speech than lower-class speakers, leading him to conclude that middle-class speech is more abstract, since another researcher had suggested that people pause in their speech more often when abstracting and generalizing than when describing. To prepare this experiment, Bernstein had twice rehearsed the working-class group for the discussion, fearing that they might be recorder-shy, whereas the oft-pausing midddle-class discussants went in cold. Many of his unretracted conclusions have been attacked by Lebov and others, e.g. Nancy Johnson, who convincingly details his shoddy experimental work in "The Research Non-Basis for 'Restricted Codes'" (1976).

Labov, in attacking the work of Bereiter, Engelmann, and Bernstein, had both to address the relation between Black English and Standard English and to explain the nature of dialects. He wrote that although "some SE forms may be outside the competence of BEV (Black English Vernacular) speakers, and although BEV does show internal cohesion,

> it is best seen as a distinct subsystem within the larger grammar of English. Certain parts of the tense and aspect system are clearly separate subsystems in the sense that they are not shared or recognized by other dialects, and we can isolate other such limited areas. But the gears and axles of English grammatical machinery are available to speakers of all dialects, whether or not they use all of them in everyday speech. (LANGUAGE IN THE INNER CITY, pp. 63-64)

Futher, it was necessary in those days to say that linguists neither think of these dialects as accumulations of errors caused by the failure of their speakers to master standard English, not "do they believe that the speech of working-class people is merely a form of emotional expression, incapable of expressing logical thought" (237). Rather, since dialects are systems, BEV "has equivalent ways of expressing the same logical content" and "compensating ways to preserve the distinctions found in other dialects" (239). As a result, linguists "speak with a single voice in codemningthe verbal deficit theory's views about Black English.

Besides demonstrating the need for adequate research, one effect of Labov's work has been to end the calls for teaching Black children standard English befoe teaching them to read. If BE is cognitively adequate, if (contrary to the early claims by Richard Venezky (1970), who had thoughtthat six month's training in SE would suffice) few children managed to become bidialectal (show me one, asks Sledd (1972)), and if, as Kochman (1969) asserts, there is not even a social need for a second dialect, somewhow the dialect will have to serve. As Walt Wolfram (1979) has mildly written:

> Before we can endorse teaching Standard English as a prerequisite for reading, we must have evidence that it can be extensively taught given the currentsociocultural facts, and that itis most effectively taught at the initial stages of education. At this point, the sociocultural facts which inhibitthe widespread acquisition of Standard English as a second dialect do not suggest this alternative as a reasonable solution.

Once Labov had cleared the way, psycholinguists such as the Goodmans and Frank Smith began to study reading in the early 1970's, bringing a flexible approach drawn from linguistic research in syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and information theory.

II

(a)

Just how does Black English cause retardation in reading, if indeed it does? Let's look at two claims. The first, by Dorothy Seymour, is that "gross differences between a child's oral language and the language he finds symbolized in instructional material can retard progress in learning to read" (1971). This statement might seem peculiar to anyone whole immigrant grandparents spoke one language at home and read another at school, or anyone whose own oral language differed greatly from a text

which offered "Look, Dick, look. See Spot run." Seymour's reasons for this conclusion are "the crucial phonological and morphological differences between so-called black English and standard English." There are two assumptions here: that printed materials must be like the speech of the reader, implying that writing is talk written down; and that the phonological and morphological differences between dialects are registered graphologically (in print) as well as in speech. But Seymour fails to tell exactly how the differences between speech and writing, between contrasting phonologies and morphologies, affect the reading process.

The second claim is by Joan Baratz (1971), who writes that although there is "apparent agreement" on "the possible role" of Black English

> in reading retardation in black children, there remains a considerable difference of opinion among linguists who have been describing the dialect as to the amount of linguistic interference, the exact source of the interference, and even the amount of bidialectalism among NNE-speaking children.

If Black English adversely affects learning to read, she is saying, the linguistic mechanism which causes the failure is some sort of interference. Exactly what intereference is, or how it affects learning to read, escapes her consideration.

The concept of interference is an extrapolation from second language learning to dialect situations. The relation between the two is made explicit by William A. Stewart (1969):

> Wherever the structure of Standard English differs from that of their own nonstandard dialect, the interference of the familiar pattern in the production of the unfamiliar pattern may occur. This is, in fact, exactly what happens when a Spanish-speaking child produces a Spanish-like English utterance...In other owrds, the learning of SE by speakers of Negro dialect is more like foeign language learning than it is like first-language learning.

Steward, like Baratz and Rudolph Troike, is a member of the Georgetown applied school, which assumes that second-language theory can be stretched to cover dialect. Troike (1972), for example, offering no evidence at all that dialects are like foreign languages, asserts that to be effective, second-dialect teaching should begin as early as possible, "because the

optimum age for language learning is before eight, after which it declines, dropping rapidly after puberty." He cites no successful second-dialect programs. Similarly, Joan Baratz (1970) failes to support her argument that "the Negro non-standard speaker trying to learn to read with a standard text is in much the same position as children learning to read a language other than the one they speak." It makes one feel foolish to point out that when one learns a new language, all of the words are in the second language, and many, if not most, of the grammatical structures are different, whereas the Black child reading a standard primer will find few differences in lexis and grammar between his dialect and the standard print dialect. If Baratc had explained how interference appies in a parallel way to dialect and second language situations, we might have the necessary mechanism to explain reading failure.

The interference theory appears to be common sense and would seem to explain why neither Willie nor Juanit can read. There are several articles aimed at writing teachers that show how Spanish speakers produce errors in wrting by trying to analogize from Spanish to English structures. But, applied to reading, the interference theory, until it is more carefully described, will carry no more explanatory power than its predecessor, the verbal deficit theory.

(b)

There are numerous problems with the theory of interference. As Labov demonstrates, languages and dialects have systematic structures. Where the grammatical systems of two dialects overlap, the theory would seem to say, there will be no interference, just as where two languages overlap, a speaker may successfullly analogize structures. But when they are organized differently, there may be problems at the points of contrast. One wonders, though, just what should be labelled interference? Is it the contrasts at the points of systematic difference, is it a posited degree of difficulty created by those differences, or is it the actual errors produced? Further, the theory in its Georgetown form is not explicit enough to distinguish between differences that are merely alternative realizations of the same deep structure, and surface differences that derive from contrasting deep structures.

Some linguists have distinguished between transfer and interference. Transfer is defined as "the process of interpreting the particular grammar of one language in terms of another, " and "the mistakes that result from this process are said to be due to interference" (DiPietro, 1976) Sometimes transfer is identified with a contrastive theory, interference with an interference theory. The speaker or writer of Spanish (Language I), because of his transfer of the structures of L_1 to English (Language 2), would make erros in L_2 which would be attributed to interference. But reading is a receptive, not a productive skill. Do we just reverse the process? If so, the L_2 text would fail to be understood because the L_1 speaker misinterprets on the basis of systematic contrast. However, this is not an inevitable conclusion. Cerrtainly, even though the reader, in trying to process the text, in some fashion acts on the text and may try to translate it into his own language or dialect, we cannot attribute all his errors to interference and be sure that interference cased them. The reason is that with receptive skills, we have no sure way of separating interference or transference errors from mere lack of familiarity with the syntactic or semantic structures of the text. Further, must we assume that the Spanish or dialect speaker, in order to read the passage in English always translates the passage into the syntax of his own language or dialect? Productive errors made in the target language are visible; we can hold them up and compare them with the syntax of the speaker's language or dialect. But receptive mistakes, those made in reading or in listening comprehension, can often be known only indirctly. The fact that listeners and readers can understand utterances and texts that they cannot produce complicates the problem. Comprehension is relative: part of it derives from accurately processing the structures and meanings produced by the encoder, part of it derives from meanings contributed by the reader or listener. Consequently, although some erros are obvious, many are not, and the line between receptive error and interpretation can never be as clear as the productive error that involves revealingly malformed syntax. We must conclude that receptive skills are not the reverse of productive skills, or at least that we cannot know whether they are.

We now arrive at the nitty-gritty. Those who argue that the interference theory applies to reading as well as to speaking, and that it can be applied both to dialect and to second-language situaitons, have developed no theoretical explanations whatsoever. They have pointed to differences between L_1 and L_2 (or Dialect 1 and Dialect 2) as a basis for their circular argument that since these differences are large enough to cause errors, they must not only be causing errors, they must also be responsible for the reading problems of Willie and Juanito. The theoretical basis for their argument is the smantically and pragmatically threadbare contrastive hypothesis of Lado (1957) that

> individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language...and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language...as practised by natives...In the comparison between native and foreign languages lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning.

This statement is common sense observation raised to explanation. As such it shows the weakness of inductive argumentation: repeated individual instances led to they theory, and a request for verification can only be referred to further repeated individual instances. Even then, arguing that reception is parallel and opposite to production exceeds the evidence—it is an intuitive deduction from an inductively established postulate.

Lado's statement that comparision between languages is the key to the degree of difficulty a learner will have with a new language (ignoring all else) suggests that we might establish an index to predict the amount of time and effort required to master Spanish (1 on the scale), French (2), Russian (7), Chinese (10) and so on. Similarly, the interference theory applied to dialect problems in reading would seem to require some index of difficulty, with gradations based on the degree of overlap between the language of the text and the spoken language of the reader. For speakers of standard English, the index of difficulty would be low, since the middle-class white kid is merely decoding the written word (or recoding it into his own print-like language) in order to obtain meaning from the text. The Black reader, however, after decoding the text, must recode it into a dialect that is systematically different from the text. This added distance,

perhaps quantifiable on an index, results from the systematic deviance that interferes with reading and learning.

Put this way, the sub-assumptions of dubious truthfulness beginning to emerge can be examined. Does a reader actually decode, then recode, phonologically, syntactically, or semantically, into his own dialect? Are the differences among the dialects spoken by white speakers of English small in comparison to the differences between Black English and standard English Is the language of most white speakers in minimal contrast to the language of instructional materials? Do the systematic differences between Black English and standard English cause less difficulty to viewers of television than to readers of print? If the systematic differences between dialects cause trouble, which causes the most, the phonological, grammatical, lexical, or the semantic?

(c)

Recent research suggests that neither the contrastive nor the interference hypotheses are sufficiently explanatory. The contrastive theory, that a comparison of the source and target languages will predict types of problems, and the interference theory, that errors arise when the language learner interprets the target in terms of the source language, have gtiven place to more detailed theories that limit the scope of the older theories. Such limitations would also affect the application of contrastive and interference theories to dialect.

Although certain problems in language learning do stem from interference, contrastive analysis has proven to be more successful at a level which reduces its significance in that it predicts better at the phonological level than at the syntactice or semantic levels. Thus, many of the interference errors involve sound but not grammatical structure or meaning. Jack Richards (1971. 1974: 173) quotes Lance (1969), whose study of Spanish-English bilingualism states:

> Many people assume, following logic that it is easy to understand, that the errors made by bilinguals are caused by their mixing Spanish and English. One of the most important conclusions this writer draws fr from the research in this project is that interference from Spanish is not a major factor in the way bilinguals construct sentences and use the language.

Lance's argument for the reduce importance of interference is at least partially corroborated by the results of the Bilingual Education Project, carried out in Redwood City, California, between 1969 and 1972 (Cohen, 1975). The researchers, using pre- and post-tests and a story-telling task, were able to describe the grammatical deviations in the spoken Spanish and English of Mexican American primary school students. Establishing "school" language as the basis for deviation analysis, they assigned deviations to three categories: language intrference, child language, or nonstandard dialect. Child language accounted for the highest percentage of the errors, but interference was a close second. Cohen concludes (a) that non-native errors are similar to the developmental errors of natives but occur later than the native speakers would make them, and (b) that "interference from the student's native language has perhaps been granted too much importance in mastering a second language, particularly in the difficulties of young children" (1975: 170).

The fialure of the older theories has led to fruitful new work. Since the early eventies, researchers have studied and catalogued inter-lingual and developmental errors, as the Lance and Redwood City work demonstrate. Now errors are no longer assinged exclusively to either-or of source or target languages. Rather, they may derive from interlingual or approximatively systems, those transitive and unstable stages of language reflected in the speech of the learner as he moves toward mastery of the target language. At each stage, according to William Nemser (1971), the learner's speech is a patterned linguistic system he calls "approximative, " and its internal structure is distinct from the internal structures of either the target or source languages. Richards has shown that although contrastive analysis helps to locate "the areas of interlanguage interference, " many errors "derive from the strategies employed by the lerner in language acquisiiton, and from the mutual interference of items within the target language" (1971), in 1974:182). According to Dulay and Burt (1974), studies of non-phonological language learning erros made by adults and by children show that few are due to interference. Most are "developmental" (overgeneralizations of patterns found in the second language), or "ambitious" ("Teresa not can go," which could be interference or a developmental error), or "unique." The full significance of these new theories and experiments for work involving dialect cannot be determined, but besides destroying the simple-mir 'ed direct application of the contrastive and interference assumptions, they should suggest that the field is open to imaginative

new hypotheses and to methodological improvements.

III

(a)

Of the new approaches to the study of second language acquisition, one by Jack Ricahrds in an article called "Social Factors, Interlanguage and Language Learning" would seem suggestive for the study of dialects. Richards, after an earlier study of the major types of intralingual and developmental errors (overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete applications of rules and building false concepts), combined psycholingusitic and sociolinguistic factors to argue "that the nature of a particular interlanguage will depend on the particular context under consideraiton" (1972, in 1974). Now, functionally, Black English cannot be seen as an interlanguage, even if, as some of its historians argue (see Burling, 1973, chapter 7), it began as one. It is not an approximation of Standard English arrested at some point between a foriegn language and fluent Standard English. Nor is it used as some immigrants use their new language, e.g., to carry out such tasks as shopping, getting a driver's license, putting the kids in school, etc., which require them to step momentarily outside the community of immigrants and to use the new language they will never master. However, it seems that considering the roles or functions carried out in and by Black English is a fruitful ex= tension of Richards' method in this article. Richards' emphasis on function rather than on form and his comments concerning the relaiton between the conditions and the outcomes of second language learning are more likely to illuminate the connection between Black dialect and reading failure than a contrastive analysis of grammatical differences.

(b)

Richards' approach is novel in that it accounts for the product of language learning by reference to scene (in Kenneth Burke's terms), and not by referring to agent, as the generativists do. The form of interlanguage is determined by the conditions or circumstances (scenic terms) in which it is learned. Richards thus reverses the generativist calculus, a reversal that affects the method of characterizing the linguistic product. The Chomskyist vocabulary features terms centering about the agent, as should an offshoot of philosophical idealism. In

Chomsky's schema, mind and its products exist independently of their material circumstances and are explainable only by reference to the nature of that which is to be explained. There is no conflict at all between an intense interest in the workings of the thing described an an explanation by reference to its nature. That nature may take different forms, producing at one time an emphasis on ontogeny or development, an another an emphasis on abstract form or on the interrelation between constituent forms. The two approaches maintain their opposition partly by a terminological sleight of hand: Richards locates mental attributes (e.g. motivation) in the scene (integraiton into the community) whereas Chomsky and his followers mentalize qualities usually ascribed to scene (particularly physiological qualities).

An examination of the workings of three representative generativist terms will show why Richards and others have been forced into a more sociological perspective to explain second language learning and dialect. The three terms are creativity, thought, and psychology. Creativity, used as a motive word to explain the source of human linguistic behavior, is practically synonymous with nature and art in the rationalistic vocabularies of neo-classicism, from which Chomsky draws heavily; and like those two terms, creativity contrasts with terms that locate origins or causes in material (i.e., social or non-mental) circumstances. In language use, Chomsky tells Parret, creativity refers:

> to a property of the use of language, of linguistic behavior; namely, that it is innovative, unbounded in scope, free from the control of external stimuli or detectable physiological states, coherent and appropriate to situations, engendering in the listener thoughts related to those of the speaker, thoughts that the listener might have expressed in a similar use of language. (Parret, 29)

This short statement reverberates back through the ages. Chomsky no doubt congratulated himself that he was the first man since Anaximanes to use "unbounded" seriously. If the statement recalls Pope's "what oft was thought ne'er so well express," the echo is not accidental, for to Chomsky as to the Augustan ethical idealist, language is the dress of thought. Language owes its origin to thought, or as Chomsky, in idealists terms, puts it, to "human intelligenceand will," not to "situations or contingencies of reinforcement" (the latter from Skinner". In fact, language is ancillary to thought: its function or purpose (terms banished by Chomsky's vocabulary) is to express thought, not communicate. Despite the "dress of thought" motif, Chomsky as a rhetorician would belong to the plain-style utilitarians who came down from Socrates and the Stoics and notto the Ciceronians.

Cicero chided the Stoic rhetoricians for their solipsism just as Chomsky has been chided for his. In neither case, according to the accusers, is there due consideratoin given to the social function of a communication, nor does the rhetorical meta-language adequately stress those connotative and decorative embellishments that no less than paraphrasable content are the meaning of an utterance. The rhetorical implications clear here and in the ideal speaker-hearer relationship help to explain why meaning is rudimentary in Chomsky, and why Richards and others have gone outside the generativist tradition. If meaning is strictly denotative and not also contextual or situational, if meaning derives from the mind of the speaker and is prior to and merely dressed for the occasion, meaning and thought are nearly identical. Language will succeed to the extent that it conveys thought. If meaning is prior to language and to speaking, it cannot be looked at as the dialectical product of the relationship between the pseaker and the speech occasion. In the beginning, kChomsky saw no great mystery in meaning and no reason to separate intention from the sentence uttered. Meaning as denotation was literally on the surface. Such things as lying or intending covert meanings required a general theory of action, not a grammar. The mystery is in the thought-language relationship, and we study it in grammar.

Chomsky fits both rhetorical conventins and semantic theory into an idealistic reather than a situational framework. Rhetorical conventions like the constraints on theory construction and other rules that govern behavior, are "theories that are in some manner matched to the structure of human cognitive capacities." In this instance we see fairly clearly Chomsky's strategy of treating situational factors under the sign of the agent. The same applies to semantic theory. Helped out by componential analysis, which constructs the semantic structure of a language on the basis of a small number of atoms of meaning, the semantic theory that has developed in the Chomskyan tradition resembles Locke's simple ideas in their ability to form complex wholes, or Leibniz"s universal characteristics, an alph - bet of human thoughts that allows the composition of elementary ideas into complex ideas. To Chomsky, Katz, and Fodor, according to Jacques Bouveresse, "the elementary semantic components represent the internal mechanisms which operate in the processing of the physical and social environment" (Parret 394). The process of translating non-mental phenomena leads to the hypothesis, that, as Bierwisch writes, "all semantic structures might finally be reduced to components representative of the basic dispositions of the cognitive and perceptual

structure of the human organism" (Lyons 1971:181). But a program that slights the communicative function of language and overloads cognition to a perverse degree cannot fully succeed. At least it cannot treat phenomena that many linguists think should be treated in linguistics.

Thus we have just seen how our third term, psychology , reflects the generativist tradition. Defined as "the structure of human cognitive capacities," psychology approaches its object of study with no concern for contextual. environmental, situational, or circumstantial matters. At least, with much less concern than its vanquished, unlamented predecessor, behaviorism. This psychology that largely ignores the world, that treats the world as the stage in which the agent unfolds or plays out his program, has had some striking successes. For our purposes the most significant are the psycholinguistic approaches to reading and to comprehension. Both of these locate items within the cognitive structure of the reader or perceiver that previous psychology placed there as the result of interaction between the subject and his environment. But contrary to what Chomsky often implies, the choice is not an either-or between an innateness hypothesis and a recductionistic behaviorism. Nor does it make sense to treat the environment as a mere heuristic that confirms or disconfirms what was already in the mind. At a certain point it becomes uneconomical to dismantle the exchange between mind and environment that once was simple-mindedly known as learning and to reshape it (using a biological metaphor) as the development of an organizsm or (using a mechanistic metaphor) as an exchange of information that activates what was already there. The generativist mind, cut off from experience, is too isolated. It does not communicate, it transmits and receives. Nor can it handle the referential function of language since language is often "about" something outside the mind, or points to it, language at times (through reception) may be prior to thought.

(c)

(c)

In the essay under discussion in this section, "Social Factors, Inter-language and Language Learning," Jack Richards argues that the type of mastery the language learner attains is determined by his possibilities for integration within the new culture. Since Richards

is duscussing immigrants, he cannot be expected to solve all of our problems, but we might borrow from his conclusion that linguistic differentiation reflects social differentiation. Here is an unofficial summary of the relation he believes to exist between the outcomes of language learning and the conditions under which a new language is learned:

1. Standard English is the outcome when the learner sees that his new society is open to his efforts and then learns the language to assume a place as a respected member in the community of standard speakers.

2. Non-standard English is the outcome when the learner learns the new language under curcumstances which prevent his becoming a member of the community of standard speakers. The dialect he learns may take on the role of marking ethnic identity and solidarity if a "self-perpetuating social stratification" correlates with race, color, or other ethnic idnicators. Here one could su=plement Richards to add that those who learn Standard and those who learn a non-standard English participate in parallel social and political institutions, even if the membership will not overlap and if the lack of overlap limits the participation of the second group.

3. A partially learned language may be the outcome of a lack of "integrative interaction" with standard speakers. This would be the case among immigrants who live among other immigrants and speak their native language a great part of the time. Formally, the partially learned language is reflected in modifications of the grammar of standard English.

4. Pidgins and Creoles, the extreme case in "non-integrative motivation," reflect the separateness of the groups in contact. Again, although Richards does not say so, there would either be no institutional overlap between learners who will speak a Standard variety and those who will speak a Pidgin or a Creole, or the same institution would play different roles in the lives of the dominant and non-dominant groups.

The ideas and approaches drewn on by Richards are not new--sociolinguists have applied them for some time--but no one had brought them to bear on the product of second language learning before. Students of Black dialect and reading would similarly benefit if their explanations of reading dysfunction focused less on phonological and grammatical phenomena and more on the sociology and pragmatics of dialect. Paradoxically, Chomsky has helped clear the way. First, his theoretical focus on competence, by making language the result of cognition, cut

the ground from under the verbal deficit psychologists, who had said that language is the basis of cognition. As a result linguists like William Labov, given elaborate formalizing devices, looked carefully at the structures of dialects to see if indeed they are cognitively adequate, then they went on to look at their social functions. Second, Chomsky helped legitimize sociolinguistic pursuits by agreeing that his work needs a sociolinguistic counterpart, even if he has no interest in providing one and retains doubts whether performance can be sufficiently formalized.

However, the major sources of Richards' work are John Gumperz, Dell Hymes, and Joshua Fishman. In their work one finds the important concepts of interaction networks, symbolic integration, and verbal repertoire as a reflection of role repertoire. There are many types of interaction networks in a speech community, e.g. family networks, interest networks, occupational networks, etc. Even a small network will require different varieties (i.e. registers) in its verbal repertoire to carry out functions necessary to maintain the network. If the members of the networks or the networks themselves are powerful and prestigious, their varieties have a greater potential to constitute a standard than the varieties of those whose smaller numbers and absence of power and prestige have reduced their array of linguistic functions. Here we begin to see that a standard might be better described in terms of its functions than in terms of its syntax and semantics. At any rate, the more powerful a speech community, whose members share at least one variety and agree on its usage, the more diversified its functions, social, economic, and political as well as linguistic.

Large speech communities, particularly large socially stratified speech communities, tend to develop a contrast between varieties in the verbal repertoire that are "primarily <u>experientially</u> acquired and reinforced by dint of actual verbal interaction within particular networks," and varieties that are "primarily <u>referentially</u> acquired and reinforced by dint of symbolic integration within reference networks which may rarely or never exist in any physical sense" (Fishman, <u>Sociolinguistics</u>, 1972:30).

These two sets of varieties, those acquired experientially and those acquired referentially, together may comprise a standard language. Taken separately, the two sets of varieties explain the differences and the relation between standard spoken English and standard written English. Standard has reference to function, to inclusion, to power and to doctrines of appropriateness, not to grammar or dialect. Thus the standard includes some dialects and excludes others. Those who look to phonology and grammar to explain the reading problems of speakers of a particular dialect are looking in the wrong place.

The standard language, it seems to me, must be seen not as a dialect, but as a linguistic agency whose purpose is to maintain power, interests and functions by specifying the rhetorical forms of symbolic acts of alienation. Knowledge of the rhetorical forms is simply the ability to make the necessary changes in behavior to match language, occasion, need, and audience. Symbolic refers to the mode of the act (written or spoken) as well as to its medium. Rhetorical appropriateness will affect the choice of concreteness or abstraction and the choice of regional or social usages in an act. Thus appropriateness specifies whether a personal or a transactional form should be used; if a speech community has only a personal form where a transactional form is required, its members are not in full possession of the standard. Alienation is used in both of its senses: it refers to one's awareness of and to the demands made by "otherness" when a speaker or writer uses the standard; and it refers to the types of erosion--personal, local, ethnic--a standard requires on its way to becoming a national multi-purpose language.

Richards assumes, no doubt correctly, that the immigrants who see a place for themselves in their new societies learn standard English best and most thoroughly. Standard here implies that in a given speech act the speaker will make a choice that others of the speech community would find appropriate. Conversely, people with no integrative possibilities, who have no potential role in maintaining the institutions of the dominant society, will not learn the standard language (its codes of appropriateness), although they acquire one or more of its

functional varieties. Since they have fewer roles in the public and institutional life of a society, there is less differentiation in their verbal function and a concentration of the roles at the points of greatest efficacy in their own sub-society. We have no difficulty extrapolating to Black English--the parallels are obvious. Just as colonizers are seldom successful at getting the colonized to read the language of the oppressor, as Richards points out--because the written form of another language serves a minimal function in their lives--so some Blacks may find learning to read well an alienating and functionally marginal act. Halliday summarizes one perspective well. After asking "what is learning to read and write?" he answers that

> Fundamentally it is an extension of the functional potential of language. Those children who don't learn to read and write, by and large, are children to whom it doesn't make sense; to whom the functional extension that these media provide has not been made clear, or does not match up with their own expectations of what language is for. Hence, if the child has not been oriented towards the types of meaning which the teacher sees as those which are proper to the writing system, then the learning of writing and reading would be out of context, because fundamentally, as in the history of the human race, reading and writing are an extension of the functions of language. This is what they must be for the child equally well. (Parret, 1974:113)

If all that one may expect or hope for in life is gained without reading, or is gained within the confines of "functional" literacy, why master the elaborate rhetorical print code, with its intricate textual and reference requirements, that learning to read involves?

Europeans learned to read in the first place because the new Gutenberg technology served and encouraged numerous nascent functions within classes, language groups and nations. National print languages evolved as standards to carry out these functions. Similarly, the child, as Halliday argues, and the ghetto-dwelling speaker of Black English learn to read and to speak the standard, one assumes, if these acts make sense and if the future is open. In this view, the standard language of speech and writing is a series of appropriate choices, some (though not the most important) involving grammatical forms. There

are many standards, each realized in a functionally powerful local dialect. From this point, it is a small step into the fields of pragmatics and ethnology, which we can only touch on and will briefly look at in Section IV.

IV.

(a)

Those who have argued that the differences between Standard and Black English are responsible for reading problems among Blacks have been able to point to a number of contrasts, both in pronunciation and in grammar, between the two dialects. The dialect features occurring most often in Black English involve changes in inflectional endings. The following list, drawn principally from Goodman (1973) and Shuy (in Laffey, 1971), summarizes the dialect features that occur most often:

Phonology

1. Consonant cluster in word-final position is often simplified (although as Labov, 1972, has shown, the unsimplified cluster underlies production): the /-st/ in test, the/-sk/ in desk, and the /-nd/ in kind are reduced to the initial consonant.
2. The /θ/ sound in all positions changes, as in think, nothing and tooth, most often becoming /f/ or /t/ word finally.
3. Omission or modification of /r/ and /l/ before consonants or at the ends of words, as in help and sister.
4. The devoicing or deletion of word final /b/, /d/, and /g/, as in pig, salad, and tub.
5. The collapsing of /i/ and /e/ before nasal consonants to /i/, as in pen/pin.
6. Monophthongization of vowel glides as in dime.
7. Simplification of a-an distinctions, as in a apple.
8. Stressing the first syllable in words that otherwise have stress on the second syllable, as in hotel, police, and Detroit.

Grammar

1. Use of the null form of the -ed past tense morpheme, as in call/called, help/helped, start/started.
2. Use of the perfective constructions I done forgot and I been had it.
3. Use of the null form of the plural noun morpheme, as in thing for things, book for books (I have five book), etc.
4. Use of the null form for third person present singular verbs: He have a book, She walk, He don't eat.
5. BE-copula deletion and substitution: He a good man; was for were, etc.
6. Future expressed as He gonna go, I'ma go, or He see you tomorrow.

7. Regular present for past irregular verb forms: run for ran, have for had, keep for kept, do for did.
8. BE used to express habitual aspect (contrasts with copula deletion): He be busy in the morning to mean 'He is always busy in the morning.'
9. Use of null form for possessives: John car for John's car.
10. Extensive use of multiple negation.
11. The embedded question structure, I ax him can he play basketball and She want to know can he come over? (See Burling, 1973, and Labove, 1972)
12. Use of frequent pronominal apposition: My brother he at the store.
13. Use of existential it: It's a lot of people in the park.

The view that phonological differences between Black and Standard English contribute to reading problems had its origin in the structuralist approach to reading. To the structuralists, who like Bloomfield thought that "writing is merely a device for recording speech," reading is a process of interpreting graphemes phonemically on the way to meaning. The reader converts the written message into speech to understand it. In the sixties linguists began to question (a) whether writing is talk written down and (b) whether the reader translates writing into some form of his speech. As late as 1971 Venezky thought that "reading...is the translation from writing to a form of language from which the reader is able to derive meaning." The "form of language" is not further specified, but we are to assume that it is some kind of interior speech. This definition and the assumptions behind it produced investigations of "the existing language habits of the reader" as the key to reading problems. The verbal deficit hypothesis flourished in this climate.

The structuralist theory of reading became known to students of educational pedagogy as the "linguistic method." Linguists, particularly Bloomfield and Fries, both of whom wrote on reading, emphasized that English writing system is essentially a representation of the phonology of spoken language. If grammar and lexis are the same in speech and writing, the beginning reader's basic task is to learn the correspondences between writing and phonology. To understand a

written word, he must go from the printed graphemes to sound (Venezky's "form of language"). The central units in reading, then, according to this orientation, are the letters, the sounds, and the words. The order here and the combinatorial nature of the basic elements reproduce the hierarchial layered model of language common to all the structuralists. In the classroom, the reading teacher instructs a child by choosing words carefully to avoid obscuring the systematic correspondences between speech sounds and their graphemic representation. Because cutting up the speech stream distorts sounds. Bloomfield and Fries proposed to teach the regular correspondences between sounds and letters in the contexts of whole words. Thus they fathered the "whole word" school and avoided what came to be called "phonics," even if part of their argument would support the phonics approach. Exercises written to teach these correspondences contained many sentences of the "One fat black cat sat on the flat mat" variety.

Although a few "linguistic" readers continue to be produced in the late seventies, the linguistic method became the object of scorn among reading specialists. Nonetheless educationalists accepted the linguists' description of the process of reading and many use it today. To read, this model tells us, readers perceive and sequentially identify letters, words, spelling patterns, and then phrases and sentences. One well-known researcher (Spache) writes that "in its simplest form, reading may be considered a series of word perceptions." The teacher's manual of the Lippencott Basic Reading series offers a letter-by-letter version: "In short, following this program the child learns from the beginning to see words exactly as the most skillful readers seem them..., as whole images of complete words with all their letters" (both quoted in K. Goodman, 1967).

In summary, then, it can be shown that underlying the dialect-interference theory are several assumptions about language and reading that can be traced to the structuralists:

1. Writing, a derivative of speech, is talk written down. This idea has a peculiar history. Current in the forties and fifties, the better theorists and textbook writers of the sixties (Karlin, 1971),

rejected the "talk written down" formula to emphasize the conventions of printed language. But more recently the psycholinguistic researchers, partly as a pedagogical tactic to help beginning readers, have been concentrating on the similarities between speech and writing. No one, however, seems to be reviving Bloomfield's doctrine that

> a speech-utterance is the same, whether it receives a written record or not, and, in principle, a language is the same, regardless of the extent to which speech-utterances of this language are recorded in writing. For the linguist, writing is, except for matters of detail, merely an external device, like the use of the phonograph, which happens to preserve for our observation some features of the speech of past times. (1933:282)

2. The reader translates writing into some form of internal speech to gain meaning.

3. The correspondences between graphology and phonology are regualr and specifiable, despite the numerous exceptions. Failure to grasp the relations entails failure to learn to read. Bloomfield wrote that "the person who learns to read, acquires the habit of responding to the sight of letters by the utterance of phonemes. This does not mean that he is learning to utter phonemes; he can be taught to read only after his phonemic habits are thoroughly established" (1933:500-501).

4. An act of reading is incremental and sequential in that after matching graphemes and phonemes the reader proceeds up the hierarchy from phonology to ever-increasing grammatical units to meaning.

5. Meaning is in the text. The writer encodes his message in the graphemes, which the reader decodes to gain meaning. Traditional reading theory has no doctrines of textuality, nor does it have anything interesting to say about comprehension. The failure of American structuralism to deal with units larger than the sentence or to replace habit-theory with a satisfactory account of how we learn damned text-theory and the rhetorical part of reading to insignificance.

6. If the reader must translate writing into some form of interior speech to understand it, and if nearly all printed matter is written in standard English, then the reader must be in control of standard English. That is, receptive skill depends on productive

ability. The speaker of a dialect, then, may be in serious trouble. In fact, Bloomfield told an entire generation of linguists, "for the native speaker of sub-standard or dialectal English, the acquisition of standard English is a real problem, akin to that of speaking a foreign language" (1933:499). The chickens come home to roost.

Now, of course, most, or at least many, people would refuse point Number Six and its assumptions. The interior language hypothesis owes its origin to a mechanistic view of language which, in Watson's words argues that "thinking is merely talking, but talking with concealed musculature." And to Bloomfield, the speaker of dialect would have such a difficult time with the standard because he would have to change his whole habit structure. Few linguists accept thebehaviorism of Watson now; everyone is aware that many, many speakers of dialect read the standard language perfectly well, suggesting that not only is the habit theory wrong but that the structuralist account of the relationship between a standard and its dialects may not be well-formulated.

(b)

Do the differences in phonology and grammar between Standard and Black English cause reading problems among Blacks? So far I have said that they do not, but in place of proof I have argued that the question is misconceived, first because it depends upon the acceptance of the interference theory, and second because it fails to give an adequate characterization of the relation between a standard language and its dialects. Now that the original question has been discredited, it is possible to report that most phonological differences between dialects are discounted as causes of reading failure and that only a few of the grammatical differences seem to be serious.

Even Labov wondered about the effects of the phonological differences between Black English and other dialects. He thought that the number of homonyms in BE might cause reading problems and devoted a full chapter to the question in Language in the Inner City. In a sophisticated series of experiments, Paul Melmed (1971) took the homonyms that Labov discussed and showed that although dialect

speakers confuse them when word lists are read to them, they "show no inability to comprehend the written word pairs while reading." On the basis of this and other experiments, Melmed concluded that phonology was not to blame for reading failure. Nor did Labov think it was. He concluded his chapter, "Some Sources of Reading Problems," wit the comment that "we do not believe that these structural differences are major causes of the problem; on the contrary, the major conclusions of our research is taht reading failure is primarily the result of political and cultural conflict within the classroom" (1972:35).

Most of those who do believe that the phonological differences cause reading failure adhere to some version of a phonic-whole world model of reading. Phonics is a technique for applying rules to the spellings of words that a reader cannot identify to come up with the sound of the words. Although Bloomfield repudiated phonics, it was primarily because blending distorts sound and because teachers are ill-trained--unlike many current writers, he thought that the sound-spelling correspondences were fairly regular and that the English writing system represents the phonology of spoken language. Phonics has been violently attacked in recent years, and no on has been more violent than Frank Smith, who argues that (a) the skilled reader is not concerned with the sounds of words, and (b) that no language has an alphabet "that represents all of its sounds (phones), and few languages have alphabets that have any simple relation to their phonemes" (1971:160).

Therefore was the intrepid Joan Baratz whistling through her teeth when she wrote that "In fact, a phonics program can be constructed that makes a sound-spelling correspondence between SE orthography and Negro English phonology explicit for the child" (1971)? Smith and others would want to ask how a phonics program is possible for Black English if phonics fails with the standard. Baratz' claim must be evaluated in the light of:

1. Smith (1971)--since there are 79 rules for 5 vowels and 83 rules for the consonants, and since 6000 test words in an experiment required 211 sound-spelling correspondences, phonics can "do no more than provide a clue," expecially since it overloads short-term memory;

2. Stewart (1969), Smith and others--sounding out words is a fiction: good readers never do it and poor readers seldom do it.

3. Bailey (1967)--the utility of the 45 most important phonic generalizations is quite low.

4. Carol Chomsky (1970)--since English spelling represents abstract underlying form, a level which is deeper than the phonetic level, a reader interprets written words according to an underlying system in which words are specified and related to their meaning rather than to their sound.

Actually Baratz probably meant nothing more than it's O.K. to teach a Black kid that /f/ is a possible realization of the digraph th: bath may be pronounced baf. Her generalization is pedagogically liberating if she means that a teacher can translate ma ny rules into the dialect of a group of speakers, changing the rule as needed for each group.

In general, despite a completely different emphasis, contemporary researchers like Carol Chomsky would agree with Bloomfield that the irregular sound-spelling-meaning correspondences between spoken and written language are nottoo serious for a beginning reader. Differences in phonology, then, are not the cause of reading failure. This conclusion cannot really surprise anyone, since the standard written language, as it appears in books, newspapers, magazines, etc. is not anyone's dialect, and everyone must translate out of it.

We conclude that if there is interference, it must be at the grammatical level. There are numerous candidates for interference, particularly aspectual differences between Black English and the standard. But the inadequacy of the concept causes trouble from the beginning. Interference, with its basis in the habit theory of behavioristic psychology, is unable to handle the facts of even a fairly major difference, since it suggests competing sets of established habits, whereas in most cases, particularly with young readers, we are concerned with lack of familiarity, not with weaker habits. Rather, to adopt a different orientation, we could say that although dialects usually have the same deep structures, they are realized by different surface structures. Lack of familiarity with a particular structure,

--and not competing habits--may, but seldom does, cause a problem in comprehension. The presence of the existential it (It's a lot of people in the park) in Black dialect contrasts with there in the standard. But the contrast is in the surface structure realization, not in the deep structure, and the difference causes no trouble whatsoever to speakers of Black dialect.

At times, as with the aspectual differences between BE and SE, the deep structures may contrast. Here is the place where differences in the dialects are most likely to cause interference, or, at least, where unfamiliarity could be serious. There is still disagreement among researchers. A few believe that dialect primers and early readers might help, since, in the beginning, they believe, oral language should probably be close to written language. Unfortunately, no one talks about functional closeness, or the exact nature of the similarity between oral and written language. They seem to mean that one transcribes from actual speech and then chooses particular structures and lexical items, sequenced in an appropriate order. There is no research on the matter--those who argue for this point of view proceed on the commonsensical basis of its obviousness. However, there is solid evidence to show that most of the time the dialect speaker can establish grammatical, just as he does phonological correspondences, unless the divergent constructions pile up too quickly to be processed. Goodman and Buck (1973) report that their work with miscue analysis shows that few syntactic miscues are caused by dialectal differences. Louise Jensen (1977) concludes that "it becomes obvious that the dialect problem is not the problem we once believed it to be."

The discrpeancies between dialects are not nearly so important as the continuing failure of the universities to turn out reading teachers who have studied dialects and who have paid some attention to recent theories of comprehension. The teacher in a second language or dialect situation must recognize that competence in reading consists of an ability to recognize and to discern deep structure by sampling from surface structure, and then to predict sequences of surface structure by imposing deep structure on it). To succeed in this operation is to comprehend. No reader can know from the beginning how surface

structures unpack deep structures, or understand the complex many-to-one and one-to-many realization relationships between deep and surface structures. These must be taught. If the development of the student's ability to recognize relations between specific surface and underlying deep structures depends upon experience, the teacher must help provide that experience. Only the student can learn to read, butthe teacher can help him focus on comprehension by providing materials with proper conceptural and syntactic loads and by preparing strategy sessions. Y. Goodman and Greene illustrate one form such a strategy session might take (1977:18-30).

The teacher must make whatever groupings in the classroom are necessary and provide whatever instruction and materials are appropriate, from language experience to benign neglect. If, as Smith claims (1975:107), meanings lie outside the utterance in the mind of a reader who reduces uncertainty by gaining knowledge--that is, meaning is not merely the result of decoding or of matching a meaning to a phonological form--the teacher will want to teach concepts rather than vocabulary, to help the student draw from his own "contexts," and to provide "non-reading concrete expereinces" (K. Goodman, 1970). To Yetta Goodman, particularly in the early stages of instruction, a teacher might approach reading through the oral language of the beginning reader. This approach contradicts the maxim of the better reading theorists and text-writers of the sixties that reading is not talk written down, but her point is not to deny that print takes on conventions and structures of its own. Rather, we have come quite a distance from those who insisted that comprehension is mediated by the speech habits of the reader,and that only standard English can bring about the mediation. Her point, a logical result of saying that all dialects are cognitively, logically, and socially adequate, is the same as Halliday's, that for the child to make sense of reading and writing, he must see it as the functional extension of speech. The reader gradually adapts to more sophisticated writing styles, ones that diverge greatly from spoken English. So, although Rudine Sims sees no need for primers in dialect, she writes that "the rejection

(c)

At long last, we come to the final section of the paper. The major claims made so far have been:

1. That the interference and contrastive hypotheses, because of their theoretical inadequacy, have given way to newer theories that do not attempt to extend second-language theory to cover dialect;
2. That the phonology and grammar of Black English are not responsible for reading dysfunction among Blacks;
3. That a strictly cognitive approach, whether carried out through linguistics or psychology, is of limited utility in studying the relation between dialect and reading and must be supplemented by sociology and sociolinguistics;
4. That a study that stresses functionality and relates literacy to the degree and types of integration within a community is more likely to explain reading failure than a strictly linguistic emphasis;
5. That Standard English is not a dialect, that it is not defined grammatically, but rather that it is a linguistic agency for various social and economic functions and as such is realized in numerous functionally powerful local dialects;
6. That the structuralist model of reading and the structuralist assumptions about the relation between language and reading (speech and writing) are wrong, and that they are responsible for a great deal of bad theory.

Because this essay has been thought of as a preliminary exploration, its conclusion is less than conclusive. The beauty of symmetry may be possible, however, where the rigor of proof is unattainable. In this case, symmetry requires a brief discussion of four matters:

1. What is reading? We have discussed reading without saying what it is, although the structuralist theory of reading has been rejected. What is it, then, that Johnney cannot do?
2. What is comprehension? Whether a person reads for pleasure or for information, the act of reading depends upon making sense of words on a page. If two fluent readers, one from the "projects" and one from the suburbs, read thesame material and discuss it with ease, would we want to say that their comprehension is exactly the same?
3. Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy has a different meaning for a

> contemporary audience than it had for a Greek audience in 458 B.C., and Warren Miller's Black dialect novel, The Cool World, means one thing to a college freshman from an eastern ghetto and another thing to his teacher. In neither case are the differences to be located in the text itself. What is the relationship between a text and the environment it is used in?

4. This essay has asserted that the reasons for reading dysfunction among Blacks are not to be found in the linguistic system but in the social system. How, then, could we formulate the relationships among people in the environment of learning to read and of teaching reading?

A. WHAT IS READING?

Although it is possible to reject many models of reading, and although a number of interesting things are known about reading, no one knows exactly what reading is or how anyone ever learns to do it. A convincing account of the process is that of Kenneth Goodman, whose article, "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game" (1967), has been referred to a number of times in this essay. Goodman has developed his theory in other articles, most notably "Analysis of Oral Reading Miscues: Applied Psycholinguistics" (1969) and "Comprehension-Centered Reading" (1970). Frank Smith, cognitive psychologist, information theorist, linguist and reading specialist, gives a similar and more complete, though nearly metaphysical, discussion in his prolific writings (1971, 1973, 1975), including many articles.

Goodman refuses the older notion that a reader proceeds by decoding a series of verbal units in sequence, and, ideally, in perfect detail. Rather, Goodman stresses the interaction between what is on the page and what the reader brings to a particular act of reading. The reader, on the basis of the linguistic structures at his command, constantly predicts what he will see.

> He samples from the available cues of the graphic display using language strategies that he has developed to select only those cues which carry the most information. He arrives at hypothetical, tentative choices (guesses) as he reads, checking them against his predictions and the grammatical and semantic constraints of which he is aware. Then he needs only enough subsequent information to confirm or disconfirm his prediction. (1970:295)

This process is the psycholinguistic guessing game. Goodman reverses the traditional argument that the best reader is the one

who most precisely identifies each letter then each word then each grammatical sequence and who remembers best each detail. Such a process is inefficient, he says, "because readers would be distracted by the excess of graphic and phonic information and would be less able to integrate it with the syntactic and semantic information they must process to deal with the text as language" (1970:295). Rather, the best readers select "the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time" (1967). The psycholinguistic guessing game, as a theory about reading, had its origin in information theory, which explored the relatively high redundancy level typical of natural language. Because of this redundancy the successful reader quickly learns to respond to a limited number of critical signals at increasingly higher levels of abstraction: he soon learns, that is, to get by without reading, first, every letter, then every word, and eventually even larger chunks of the text. Frank Smith has defined the "fluent reader" as "a person who can make optimal use of all the redundancy in a piece of text" (1971:220).

Goodman examines the reading errors (called miscues in the theory developed from his work) made by two readers to show that there is an underlying logic to them which would be missed by the model of precise sequential identification. He concludes that one of the readers "decoded graphic input meaning and encoded meaning in oral output with transformed grammar and changed vocabulary, but with the basic meaning retained" (1967). Such an analysis can explain how a fourth grader saw "Study words meanings first," but read aloud "Study what it means." Analysis of readers' miscues points to "a selective, tentative, anticipatory process quite unlike the process of precise, sequential identification that is commonly assumed." Miscue analysis, studying the errors made during oral reading, shows that proficient readers decode directly from the graphic stimulus on the page and then, to produce an oral version of what is on the page, they encode from the deep structure. "Their oral output is not directly related to the graphic stimulus and may involve transformations in vocabulary and syntax, even if meaning is retained. If their comprehension is inaccurate, they will encode this changed or incomplete meaning as oral output."

Clearly, then, the reader is not just working from the graphic source in front of him. Readers have not one but three sources of information: besides the graphic the reader draws on syntactic and semantic information.

The Reading Miscue Inventory, developed by Goodman and his associates at Wayne State Univeristy, is a useful tool from indicating the reading strategies readers use and for pointing out their strengths and weakinesses. The person administering the RMI asks the cooperating reader to read a passage of a level slightly higher than he could manage easily in order to produce analyzable miscues. The complicated procedure seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Is the misuce a result of a dialect variation?
2. Is there graphic similarity between the miscue and the actual word?
3. Is there auditory similarity between the miscue and the actual word?
4. Do both the miscue and the actual word have the same function?
5. Is the miscue corrected?
6. Is the miscue grammatically and semantically acceptable?
7. Does the miscue produce a change in meaning?

The answer to these questions, once scored, leads to judgments about the reader's reading strategies and knowledge and use of language. Teaching techniques to deal with particular problems--graphic, syntactic, semantic--are then worked out and applied.

Use of the Reading Miscue Inventory, whether or in Detroit or elsewhere, has shown that Black dialect is not thecause of reading problems. The miscues made by poor Black readers are thesame as those made by unskillful white readers. My own work with RMI seems to show that errors made by an older, unsuccessful reader are similar to those made by a younger, skillful reader, suggesting a developmental rather than a dialectal or racial source. Goodman's model can tell us what skills the poor reader lacks, and it may lead to strategies to improve reading, but it cannot tell us why there are so many reading problems among Blacks.

B. WHAT IS COMPREHENSION?

Comprehension is a serious problem in reading theory. What is the major source of the meanings that the reader carries away from the act of reading? Is it the meanings encoded in the text by the author, whose intentions we discover by working through the grammatical and rhetorical patterns? Or is it the meanings brought to the text by the reader, whose knowledge of language and experience of the owrld are the primary input? The problem arises because we have two independent terms, the Text and the Reader, that confront each other in a manner that is little understood. Usually we abstract the confrontation from social, cultural, or historical settings: given this mind, this text, and this reading, what is the result? The typical classroom setting and the testing industry prefer such an abstraction, for without it, testing for comprehension is not quantifiable. If we do not abstract, if we grant full historicity and contextuality to text and to reader, how could we ever know what meanings are taken away, how could we even define comprehension, let alone teach students to become better at "it"?

Let's look at two published and influential definitions of comprehension. In his traditional but very fine book, Developmental Reading in the Middle and Secondary School (Macmillan, 1977), Lawrence Hafner has argued that the source of comprehension is the meaning intended by the author and encoded in vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical patterns (129-30). Comprehension is:

1. The reader's ability to "follow the pattern of thinking inintended and structured in the author's writing."
2. The ability "to make a thorough logical analysis of conceptual or cognitive relationships" that the intention of the author has encoded in the text.

To Frank Smith, on the other hand, comprehension begins with the reader and his thought processes, not with the intended meanings in the text. To him comprehension is:

1. "The condition of having cognitive questions answered, the absence of uncertainty" (1975:34);
2. "A matter of predicting what the language producer will say or write" (1975:92)

But most importantly, Smith writes, the meanings of utterances

"lie outside the utterances, in the mind of the speaker or listener," for comprehenison is not just taking from a text what the author wants us to know, but taking what we want to know.

Neither of these writers is particularly dogmatic, and neither insists on his half of the definition to the exclusion of the other half. Hafner wants to make comprehension cognitive as well as textual, as his emphasis on the reader's ability illustrates. Once a reader has understood a text he will go on to relate the information to a cognitive structure, and in so doing will restructure it, catalogue the details, etc. In fact, "comprehension is rooted in and synonymous with intelligence." What Synonymous with intelligence? What does that mean? It means that however you look at it, comprehension is an it, an essentialist something, not just acts of relating, and it can be described in definite terms and quantified. The jump from text to intelligence, from traditional rhetoric to cognitive psychology, is totally unacceptable. First, if a student misses the message in the text, his interpretation is wrong. Second, if he fails to make a proper conclusion or to manipulate his conclusions to our satisfaction, he is unintelligent. It is possible both to show how bad his interpretation is and to illustrate his low intelligence by quantification. What this cognitive interpretation of comprehension fails to do, and what what cognitive theories in general fail to do, is to relate the terms in any process to their concrete historical, cultural and social environments, and to understand that such terms as text and reader are semiotic entitles defined not just by their inner configurations but by the complex associations and relationships that they carry with them. Cognitive theories were quite welcome atfirst because they delivered language and psychology from the tyranny of behaviorism, but they become tyrannical themselves when they fail to develop an adequate theory of contextuality.

Other textual-cognitive theories of comprehension have the same problems in they combine unknowns and unspecificables into normative, inflexible instruments of evaluation. Most theories of comprehension have at least three components, the literal, the inferential, and the critical. Each component is assigned textual and cognitive criteria.

Karlin (1971), for example, gives for the literal component the textual function of acquiring the author's stated "ideas and information," and the cognitive function of comprehending the vocabulary and relationships among words. Inferential reading is "reading between the lines" to make generalizations and carrying out the cognitive tasks of deducation and induction ("convergent thinking"). How all of these things happen and what warrant exists for arguing that they do or should happen seems to matter very little, so long as textual and cognitive criterial dovetail in the taxonomy of comprehension.

Frank Smith's theory of comprehension is much more reasonable and less solipsistic than it would seem to be. To describe comprehension, we must describe three different roles. First there is the role of the speaker or writer:

> For a speaker or writer, the meaning of a sentence is inseparable from his original intention in producing the sentence: it is the information he wants the listener to derive, the knowledge he has tried to codify, the changed state of affairs he has tried to bring about (1975:107).

The second role, that of the listener or reader, consists of having cognitive questions answered and of predicting what the speaker/writer will encode. In this case the meaning (comprehension) is the information he manages to derive from a text. For the third role, Smith postulates a type of Ideal Comprehendor who synthesizes the other two roles.

> And for the third party--the teacher 'explaining' a passage in a novel or the linguist analyzing a sentence--the meaning is his intuition of the intention of the original writer or speaker, very much affected by the particular point that the third party wants to make.

A similar problem exists in literary circles. T.S. Eliot and Ivor Winters, one of literature's least likely couples, argued that the text mediates and expresses the author's intention to prevent wanton associationism on the reader's part. Eliot wrote:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (Selected Essays, 124-25)

The theory seems rather crude now, and its conclusion suggests a version of behaviorism, but if art is to communicate and to evaluate, the reader must understand the author's intention. The transaction between the reader and writer must be fairly exact, but since art proceeds by indirection, it requires mediation. Winters' approach to comprehension is yet more literal in that he assumed that words have a precise signification and that all readers understand that meaning:

> The poet tries to understand his experience in rational terms, to state his understanding, and simultaneously to state, by means of the feelings we attach to words, the kind and degree of emotion that should be motivated by this understanding. (In Defense of Reason, 464)

The application to reading might be made clearer by invoking the notion of context. Winters and Eliot both wrote in the context of ethnical evaluation of action through poetry, and both had strong roots in American puritanism. For them, however, the word was tradition, not context. To anyone within the same or similar tradition, their criticism and their poetry would make sense. Smith's Ideal Comprehendor is someone who struggles to increase his ability to function in different contexts. But we must not miss the narrowness in Eliot and Winters, whose prescriptive judgments about understanding or comprehending meanings are the corollaries of their ethical absolutism. There is a similar absolutism in Hafner and Karlin, but since it is cultural and not ethical, ethnological and not moral or aesthetic, it is more difficult to detect.

In literary criticism William Empson's theories about meaning in Seven Types of Ambiguity are quite similar to the listen-reader's role in Smith's three-part structure of understanding. Meaning is what the reader takes away, not matter how he does it. We may grade different poems into one of the seven ambiguous types, but which class any particular poem belongs to depends in part on your own mental habits and critical opinions. This is to classify in terms of the reader rather than the poem, and Empson's psychologistic emphasis stresses the emotive aspect of language over the referential.

What is the way out of the problem? I.A. Richards tried to synthesize a new approach to founding a new rhetoric based on semantic analysis. Richards may be quite out of date now, but his work remains suggestive. Meanings are not absolute, he argues, but neither are they strictly personal. Since language is a social fact as well as a part of personal experience we must deal with a constant tension between ambiguities and shared communication. In general, stable meanings derive from stable contexts. But if contexts shift in the many ways that contexts do, meanings will not be stable. As a result, an author cannot "build up the meaning of his sentences as a mosaic is put together of discrete independent tesserae." The senses of the author's words are not such "fixed factors" as these. Instead, what we call the "meanings" of his words and structures are "resultants which we arrive at only through the interplay of the interpretative possibilities of the whole utterance" (Philosophy of Rhetoric, 1936:55) The words and structures, in his explicitly named "context" theory of meaning, are qualified by the whole context in which they figure, and they bring to that context powers derived from other contexts in which they have figured in the past. Consequently, the reader, like the writer, finds meaning through a process of exploration. "Inference and guesswork!" Richards writes. "What else is interpretation? How apart from inference and skilled guesswork, can we be supposed ever to understand a writer's or speaker's thought?" (53).

C. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A TEXT AND THE ENVIRONMENT IT IS USED IN?

Given I.A. Richards' contextual theory of meaning and Jack Richard's theories of language learning and language use, we may begin:

1. To understand that the reader-text relationship demands a more complicated description than most treatments of reading or of meaning/interpretation are willing to provide;
2. To develop a theory of reading dysfunction that can incorporate into its model the consequences of severe contextual conflict.

The purpose of this section is to develop the first point. The last section will take up the second. In Figure I, I have tried to provide

a model of meaning that grants to the act of reading its full contextual complexity. Both the reader and the text must be located in and are the products of historical, cultural, and social contexts. A writer who has, in Halliday's phrase, "learned to mean" in one context writes a text that encodes numerous conscious intentions. Someone who has learned to mean in a similar context may well be able to paraphrase his intentions as they are expressed in the grammatical, rhetorical, and plot patterns of the work. But the text also encodes unconscious and culture-bound meanings. Further, if the work exists through time, its appearance in later contexts begins to develop the semiotics of that text. Meanings accrue. The relationship between the original, intentional meanings, the original unconscious meanings and the later textual semiotics becomes quite complicated. At any one time the signifying potential of the text is nearly unlimited. However, reading that text usually provides a context that narrows the possible meanings considerably. When we read Shakespeare in an English class, the number of meanings is usually circumscribed by the setting, emphasis and so on.

The reader, as well, brings a complicated history to the act of reading. Just as we can specify an underlying set of intentional meaning for the text, we might postulate an underlying grammatical and rhetorical competence for the reader. But even that competence is conditioned by history. The reader's Comprehension Potential in any act of reading is determined by his general grammatical-rhetorical competence, but also by any number of social and psychological factors, some deep, some on the surface. (He may have a headache; he may be from a class or race that is customarily forced to submit to demeaning tests of skill by another class or race.)

Given a model of this type, it becomes obvious that the number of readings possible in any act of reading are very large. Usually, of course, there are nearly as many constraints on possible meanings so that most of them will not be actualized. It is possible but unnecessary to enumerate these constraints. The point here is that one group may assume constraints, make them normative, and enforce them against another group that would prefer other or no constraints, but which is powerless to do other than accept the enforced constraints.

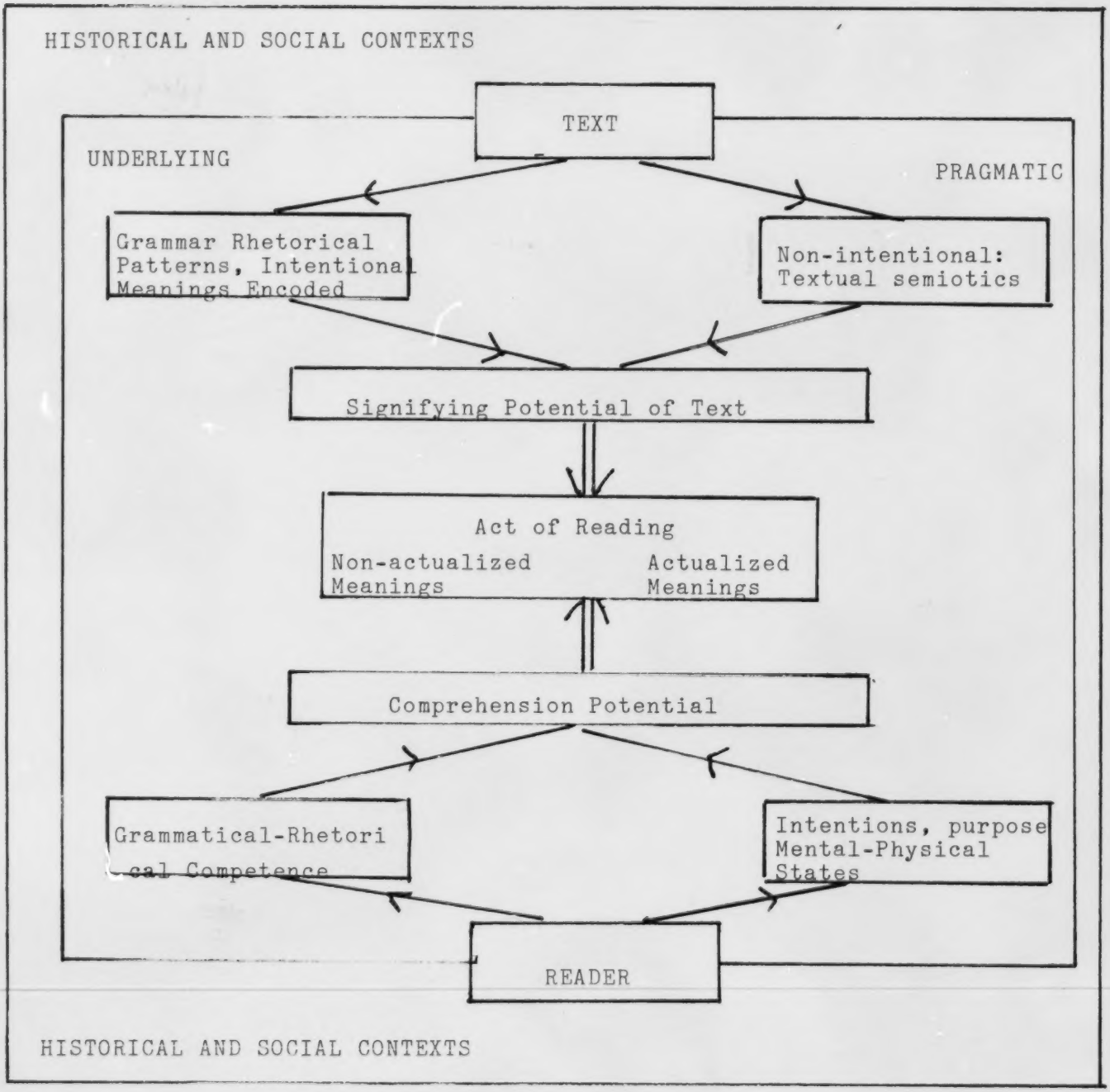

Figure 1: HOW THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE READER AND THE TEXT CREATES MEANING

D. HOW COULD WE FORMULATE THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PEOPLE IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF LEARNING TO READ AND OF TEACHING READING?

The most comprehensive field, the academic discipline best able to synthesize the relevant data and contexts, the approach most likely to answer the question "What causes reading dysfunction among speakers of Black dialect?" seems to be ethnography. Ethnography, according to Sherzer, is "that branch of anthropology which has to do with the description of the way people live in particular communities" (1977:144). The ethnography of speaking has developed to study how the members of a community arrange their communications. Its basic model states that communicative behavior, including reading, requires several interacting and related perspectives to be understood. These are (1) linguistic or (socio)linguistic resources; (2) forms of social interaction, including "rules for speaking," which suggests there may be "rules for reading" as well; (3) types of discourse.

In a fascinating article called "The Ethnography of Speaking and Reading," Ray P. McDermott points out that the ethnography of speaking has discovered two important patterns that may be significant for reading. The two are (1) that people in different communities, particularly across cultures, seem to know quite different things about speaking, and (2) that "in a community, different people appear to know different things about how to get along linguistically, and they use those differences to negotiate statuses and roles" (1970:155). These two points, transferred to reading, suggest that people in different communities develop different ways of handling literacy, and that "within any given community in developed countries, some people learn to do more with reading materials than others, and they use these differences to negotiate statuses and roles with others." This field would seem to bring together the requisite linguistic, sociological, political and anthropological information to make sense of a problem that has not yet been studied to anyone's satisfaction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, P. David, and Dorothy J. Watson (eds.). Findings of Research in Miscue Analysis: Classroom Implications. Urbana: ERIC Clearinghouse and NCTE, 1976

Bailey, Mildred Hart. "The Utility of Phonic Generalizations in Grades One through Six." Reprinted from Reading Teacher, February 1967, in Johnson (1976).

Baratz, Joan C. "Educational Considerations for Teaching Standard English to Negro Children." In Ralph W. Fasold and Roger Shuy (eds.), Teaching Standard English in the Inner City. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1970.

_____, "Relationship of Black English to Reading: A Reveiw of Research." In Laffey (1971).

Bereiter, Carl, and Siegfried Engelmann. Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Pre-School. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.

Bernstein, Basil. "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences" (1964). In John J. Gumpers and Dell Hymes (eds.), The Ethnography of Communication. American Anthropoligist, 66 (6), Part 2.

_____, "Social Class, Linguistic Codes, and Grammatical Elements." Language and Speech 5:221-240 (1962).

Bierwisch, Manfred. "Semantics," In John Lyon (ed.), New Horizons in Linguistics. Harmondsworth (Eng.): Penguin, 1970.

Burke, Carolyn. "Dialect and the Reading Process." In Laffey (1971).

Burling, Robbins. English in Black and White. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973.

Chomsky, Carol. "Reading, Writing, and Phonology." Harvard Educational Review 40 (2): 287-309 (1970).

Cohen, Andrew D. A Sociolinguistic Approach to Bilingual Education. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1975.

Di Pietro, Robert J. Language Structures in Contrast. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury Hourse, 1976.

Dulay, Heidi C., and Marina K. Burt. "You Can't Learn without Goofing: An Analysis of Children's Second Language 'Errors.'" In Richards (1974).

Goodman, Kenneth S. "Analysis of Oral Reading Miscues: Applied Psycholinguistics." Reading Research Quarterly 5(1): 9=30. (1969).

_____, "Comprehenison-Centered Reading." Reading Conference Yearbook 34: 125-135 (1970).

Goodman, Kenneth S., and Catherine Buck. "Dialect Barriers to Reading Comprehension Revisited." Reprinted from Reading Teacher. October 1973, In Johnson (1976).

Goodman, Kenneth. "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game." Journal of the Reading Specialist 4:126-135 (1967).

Goodman, Yetta, and Jennifer Greene. "Grammar and Reading in the Classroom." In Shuy (1977).

Goodman, Yetta, and Carolyn L. Burke. Reading Miscue Inventory Manual: Procedures for Diagnosis and Evaluation. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Goodman, Yetta. "Reading Comprehension: A Redundant Phrase." Reprinted from Michigan Reading Journal, Spring 1975, in Johnson (1976)

Griffin, Peg. "Reading and Pragmatics: Symbiosis." in Shuy (1977).

Halliday, M.A.K. Explorations in the Functions of Language. New York: Elsevier North-Holland, 1973.

Horvath, Barbara. "Sociolinguistics and Reading." In Shuy (1977).

Jensen, Louise. "Dialect." In Allen (1976).

Johnson, Nancy A. Current Topics in Language. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1976.

_____. "The Research Non-Basis for 'Restricted Codes.'" In Johnson, (1976).

Karlin, Robert. Teaching Elementary Reading. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971.

Kochman, Thomas. "Social Factors in the Consideration of Teaching Standard English." Florida FL Reporter 7:83-90 (1969)

Labov, William. Lnaguage in the Inner City. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.

Lado, Robert. Linguistics Across Cultures. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1957.

Laffey, James L., and Roger Shuy (eds.). Language Differences: Do They Interfere? Newark, Del: International Reading Association, 1971.

Sims, Rudine. "What We Know about Dialects and Reading." In Allen (1976).

Sledd, James. "Doublespeak: Dialectology in the Service of Bib Brother.: Reprinted from College English, January 1972, in Johnson (1976).

Smith, Frank. Comprehension and Learning. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

_____, Understanding Reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

_____, Psycholinguistics and Reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Steward, William A. "On the Use of Negro Dialect in the Teaching of English." In Joan C. Baratz and Roger Shuy (eds.), Teaching Black Children to Read, Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969.

Troike, Rudolph C. "Receptive Bidialectalism: Implications for Second-Dialect Teaching." In Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph C. Troike (eds.), Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Venezky, Richard L. and Robin S. Chapman. "Is Learning to Read Dialect-Bound?" In Laffey (1971).

Venezky, Richard L. "Nonstandard Language and Reading." Elementary English 47: 340-348 (1970).

Weber, Rose-Marie. "Linguistics and Reading," ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics 1-29 (May 1970), reprinted in Eldon Ekwall (ed.), Psychological Factors in the Teaching of Reading. Columbus: Charles Merrill, 1973.

Wolfram, Walt. "Sociollinguistic Alternatives in Teaching Reading to Nonstandard Speakers." Reading Research Quarterly 6: 12-19 (1970).